

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEHRAN 04836

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, IR
SUBJ: PUBLIC REACTION TO SHAH'S INTERVIEW

REF: TEHRAN 04584 (NOTAL)

1. OVER THE PAST FEW DAYS AMBASSADOR AND OTHER EMBOFFS
HAVE BEEN GETTING REACTIONS FROM VARIOUS INFORMED AND LESS-
INFORMED MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC TO THE SHAH'S INTERVIEW OF
MAY 13. A LARGE BODY OF OPINION APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN
SURPRISED, DISAPPOINTED, AND PERHAPS EVEN A LITTLE SCARED
BY WHAT THESE PEOPLE PERCEIVED AS INDECISIVENESS, NERVOUSNESS,
AND IMPRECISION IN THE WAY THE SHAH CONDUCTED THE INTERVIEW.
THEY TELL US THEY HAD EXPECTED THIS FIRST INTERVIEW GIVEN ONLY
FOR IRANIAN MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES AND CONCENTRATING
MAINLY ON DOMESTIC AFFAIRS TO BE DEFINITIVE AND GIVE
THE LEAD TO GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE IN FACE OF A VARIETY
OF UNCERTAINTIES CREATED HERE BY ALMOST DAILY DEMONSTRATION-
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TIONS AND VANDALISM THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY AS WELL AS
SOME PRETTY WILD RUMORS.

2. UNLIKE HIS BEHAVIOR IN THE PAST IN SUCH APPEARANCES,
THE SHAH WAS PERCEIVED AS NERVOUS, SOME THOUGHT PERHAPS
EVEN A BIT SHAKEN OR SCARED. HE DID NOT ANSWER QUESTIONS
PUT TO HIM, FOR EXAMPLE A DIRECT QUESTION ON THE REASON

BEHIND THESE PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS AND OUTBURSTS. HE DECLINED TO GIVE THE FIGHTING ANSWER AS HE HAS IN THE PAST, I.E., BLAMING FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT AND RED AND BLACK REACTIONARIES, BUT NEITHER DID HE TRY A CONCILIATORY LINE, WHICH WAS ANOTHER POSSIBILITY. MANY IN THE ESTABLISHMENT WHO SUPPORT THE SHAH AND COUNT ON HIS LEADERSHIP FELT THAT HE HAD FALLEN BETWEEN TWO VIABLE APPROACHES: EITHER FIRM AND HARD LINE OR SOFT AND CONCILIATORY. INSTEAD, THEY FIND IT DIFFICULT TO INTERPRET WHAT HE SAID OR GLEAN AN IDEA OF THE DIRECTION IN WHICH HE WANTS THEM TO GO.

3. INTERESTINGLY, ONE EMBASSY CONTACT WHO SEES A GOOD DEAL OF THE CONSERVATIVE RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT SAYS THAT THE INTERVIEW WAS RELATIVELY WELL RECEIVED IN THOSE CIRCLES. IT WAS PERCEIVED AS SUFFICIENTLY CONCILIATORY TO PERMIT HOPE OF SOME SORT OF DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE LEADERS OF ISLAM AND THEIR MONARCH.

4. COMMENT: EMBASSY SEES THIS INTERVIEW AS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THE SHAH'S UNCERTAINTY AT THIS STAGE OF HIS INTERNAL LIBERALIZATION PROGRAM. HE IS EMBARKED ON AN UNFAMILIAR VENTURE: TO LOOSEN THE REINS OF POWER AND PERMIT EXPRESSIONS OF OPPOSITION FROM A VARIETY OF QUARTERS WITHOUT ALLOWING THE FORMATION OF A CREDIBLE THREAT TO HIS DYNASTY. HE ALSO HOPES BY THIS MEANS TO CREATE GREATER POPULAR ENTHUSIASM FOR HIS RULE AND PROGRAMS. CONFIDENTIAL

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HOWEVER, HIS EXPERIENCE OF POWER TO DATE HAS INVOLVED WINNING IT FROM OPPOSITION ELEMENTS WHO RESISTED HIS TAKING IT AND THEN CONSOLIDATING HIS HOLD WITHOUT MUCH REGARD FOR HIS OPPONENTS' LIBERTY OF EXPRESSION. WHILE POLITICAL SKILLS MUST HAVE PLAYED SOME ROLE IN THE INITIAL CONSOLIDATION OF POWER, AGAINST HEAVY ODDS AT TIMES, OTHER FACTORS SUCH AS STEADFASTNESS AND FIRMNESS IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY, COMPLETE LOYALTY, MILITANCY AND READINESS TO CONFRONT BY FORCE AS NECESSARY, ALL PLAYED A MORE IMPORTANT ROLE.

5. THE LONG PERIOD OVER THE PAST 15 YEARS DURING WHICH THE SHAH HAS BEEN PUSHING HIS "SHAH-PEOPLE REVOLUTION" RIDING OVER OPPONENTS OF A RELIGIOUS AS WELL AS LEFTIST CAST HAS DONE LITTLE TO DEVELOP HIS POLITICAL SKILLS. HE HAS GAINED EVEN MORE SELF-CONFIDENCE AND GRADUALLY WORKED HIMSELF INTO A POSITION WHERE HE CONSULTS FEWER AND FEWER PEOPLE IN THE SENSE OF GETTING THEIR ADVICE. MANY IN THE ESTABLISHMENT REMARK ON THIS SHRINKAGE OF DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE SHAH AND HIS RELATIVELY CLOSE SUPPORTERS. SINCE HIS RULE CONTINUES TO BE HIGHLY PERSONAL AND ALL DECISIONS OF ANY SIGNIFICANCE MUST BE MADE BY HIM, THE PERCEPTION OF WHAT DIRECTION HE IS MOVING IN BECOMES VERY IMPORTANT FOR HIS

FOLLOWERS AS WELL AS THE OPPOSITION.

6. YET LIBERALIZATION IS PRECISELY SOMETHING WITH WHICH THE SHAH IS PERSONALLY LESS FAMILIAR. HIS DOUBTS AS TO TACTICS TO USE TRANSLATE THEMSELVES TO HIS FOLLOWERS AS SELF-DOUBT: HIS LAUDABLE WILLINGNESS TO EXPERIMENT IN AN EFFORT TO CREATE MORE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION MAY APPEAR AS INABILITY TO MAKE UP HIS MIND. THE NORMAL CONCLUSION THAT MANY DRAW IS THAT HE IS LOSING HIS TOUCH. WE ARE NOT SURE THAT THE SHAH HAS SUFFICIENT FEEDBACK TO REALIZE THIS IS THE IMAGE HE IS PROJECTING AT LEAST IN SOME QUARTERS. THUS, THE GAP GROWS EVEN GREATER BETWEEN THE SHAH AND MANY OF HIS FOLLOWERS AS HE STRIVES FOR A VIABLE POLICY WHICH WILL BE AS CONSISTENT AS HIS POLICIES HAVE GENERALLY BEEN IN CONFIDENTIAL

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THE PAST. IRONICALLY, THE SHAH'S OWN WELL DOCUMENTED RECORD OF UNUSUAL CONSISTENCY ON MOST QUESTIONS (SOME CALL IT STUBBORNESS) WORKS IN THIS REGARD AGAINST HIM.

7. AT THE SAME TIME, THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT IN OUR MINDS THAT THE SHAH REMAINS MASTER OF ALL NECESSARY INSTRUMENTS OF POWER. THUS, THE REALITY IS DIFFERENT FROM HIS IMAGE. THE SHAH IS MORE OPEN-MINDED AND READY TO SHIFT TACTICS THAN MANY OF HIS HARD-LINE FOLLOWERS. WHAT MIGHT SUGGEST WEAKNESS AND SELF DOUBT TO SOME OF THEM IS PROBABLY SEEN BY THE SHAH AS THE WORKING OUT OF A DIFFICULT PROBLEM.
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